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Through My Daughter's Eyes

Elisia Freed

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Through My Daughter's Eyes

(TITLE)

BY

Elisia Freed _____

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Through My Daughter's Eyes

Elisia J. Freed

Introduction

My daughter Ryleigh is three-years-old and inspires me every day to look at the world in a different way. She wakes up each morning full of curiosity, yearning to learn about and experience the world. Drawn to nature, she plays with rocks, trees, and leaves as if they are her friends. The wonder with which she views aspects of the world that are often ignored causes me to pause and reflect on the complexities and beauty of the world. As people grow from children into adults, they often lose their ability to imagine and create, to notice and appreciate the little everyday things that children do not take for granted. Through my daughter's eyes, I've captured a glimpse of how she sees the world. She has challenged me to think deeper about nature and to connect with and marvel at the world around me, just as she does.

When I First Heard You Cry

Your tiny hands
grip my finger tightly,
binding me to you
like a Chinese finger trap
that I never want
to let me go.

Your eyes
hypnotize me
like a shooting star
and I can't look away.

Life before you
fades like old
black and white
photographs
gathering dust
in the corners.

At 4am, you hold
your bottle
with your feet
as I slowly
rock you to sleep.

You will not
remember this,
but these are
the moments
that will hang
in my memory
like the Mona Lisa
in the Louvre.

Eternal Bond

Screams shatter heavenly silence
too short for dreams to come.

Stumble in the darkness
towards the jarring shrieks,
toes smarting from
obstacles that moved in the night.

Mix formula without thinking,
grab the howling bundle from her crib.
Ravenous, she guzzles
while I rock her slowly.
Eyes threaten to collapse,
can't blink or they'll forget to open again.

Peace...

Jerk awake to realize
fell asleep with eyes wide open.
Tiny fingers grasp mine,
she stares up at me with trust.
Irrevocable love
resonates from her tiny body.

I hug her closer
knowing that I'd sacrifice
a thousand sleepless nights
for this moment, this eternal bond...

A Baby's Wonder

I gaze
at your curiosity
as your tiny fingers
slowly reach
for the bubble
and pull back in shock
when it pops.

I watch
your eyes dart in wonder
at the grocery store
as you clap in awe
at rainbowed apples.

I hear
your joyous coo
ring out as you
stroke the broccoli.

I marvel at how
for you
life just is.

The Adoption

He was a stranger to you
when he stepped off that white bus.
Another body dressed in camo
like mama sometimes is,
but not mama.
Short hair, hard hands,
different.

You squeezed your eyes shut
when he reached out for you,
buried your face in my shoulder.
After six months without him,
you didn't know him
and put your hand out,
pushing him away.

You avoided his face at Walmart,
turning sideways in the cart,
eyes pleading with me to rescue you.

But when he told you
to pick any toy you wanted,
you reached for a plush, tan cat,
eyes wide, and hugged her close.

As he signed the receipt
making the adoption final,
you looked into your daddy's eyes
for the first time
and smiled.

Miss Kitty

Matted and worn
from baths in the washer,
her neck broken, ears limp,
but full of the energy of
a two-year-old child,
she races my daughter down slides,
colors masterpieces as tiny fingers
hold the crayon in her paw,
and don't dare sit in Kitty's seat on the couch
or Kitty will cry and think you don't like her.
She's buckled up for safety in the van,
sits at the table with a plate of fake food,
makes "Kitty Snow Angels"
and needs kisses at bedtime.

She voices her concerns through my daughter
whose face is wracked with empathy
Miss Kitty wants to watch Spongebob!
She's got a headache, Mommy!
Oh no! Kitty fell off slide,
have to take her doctor, mommy,
she needs band-aid!

She needs neck surgery,
but she'll survive the procedure
with the faith of the little girl
holding her paw, dreaming
of all the things they will do
together.

Young

The golden rays have bleached
your locks almost white
as they fly around your face in the wind.
You laugh harder and louder
with each push
as you swing faster and higher
in this perfect moment.

Role Reversal

After watching your cousins,
you decide you want to go tubing.
We climb on the two-person raft,
you on one side, me on the other.
You grip the rope holds tight
as we drift further from the boat.
Giggling gleefully, you push
the hair out of your face.
As the boat accelerates,
water pours over my side of the raft
and suddenly you're flying
over my head and the flipped raft
hits me, pushing me under.
I thrash through the waves,
frantically screaming your name,
unable to see your head bobbing
above the water.
From twenty feet away,
you call, *Mommy, are you okay?*
The concern of a parent
in your little voice.

Captain Ryleigh, Age 2

Sweat glazes your arms
and your legs stick
to the boat's vinyl seats.
Leaning over the side,
you shriek, *Mommy, look!*
I take bath in big bath tub!

While swimming,
you spy a bit of seaweed
and reach for it,
pushing me away.
No need mommy hold me,
green rope keep me here.

When it's time to leave,
you shout, *Go, boat, go! We stay!*
When I ask how we will get home,
you tell me, *Ryleigh's a boat, see?*
and put your face in the water,
blowing bubbles.
Climb on, mommy,
Ryleigh boat take you home.

In the Middle of the Night

Vomit milk
drowns lavender air freshener.
A shrill scream
stifled by gagging
and your stomach erupts
again.

Your hands grasp
for me blindly.
With a weight-lifter's strength
in two-year-old arms,
you pull me toward you
as your stomach empties
down my shirt.

You cling
like a monkey.
Sobs mix with choking,
your cheeks puff out
and you throw up
again.

A bath
and changes of clothes later,
you drift off to sleep
in my arms.

Then a shriek
and you reach for the trash can
not spilling a single drop.

Eyes exhausted,
you wipe your mouth
and cuddle against me.

Tears of pride fill my eyes
as I hold you close.

I Live in a House

Beer bottles break on asphalt,
 shattering sleep's silence.
Shouts thunder from outside—
 reckless, rowdy racket.
Techno blares, smoke billows
 from the open door across the street.
Exploding exhaust reverberates
 from the road.

I live in a house, but not a home.

Scared sobs echo down the hall,
 my daughter wakes from dreams
as outside someone stumbles,
 stoned,
screaming into his phone
 against her window.
He swears he's speaking
 to people who live here.

Other strangers stride up my stairs,
 trudge past me to the door.
I block their path
 as they insist their friends are inside.

Another sleepless night
 my child crying.
Another morning wasted
 picking up pieces of glass
by my daughter's swing set.
Another day dreading
 the coming of night,
longing for a home.

Retaining Sanity

Streetlights fade
as thick fog
cloaks the night black.

I drive on.

It's below freezing,
but the cool air
blowing through
the open windows
refreshes me,
releases me.

The night is dismal
as I move deeper
into the fog,
not seeing a single
house, car, or light,
not hearing a single sound.

I breathe in deep,
relishing the silence,
the peacefulness
of country roads
so far from life.

Ryleigh's Choice

Entering the house,
you run into the kitchen
and crawl inside
the lower cupboards,
yell *Mommy, I'm hiding!*
You can't find me!
You race through the rooms,
place Miss Kitty outside
a windowed closet door,
go inside and peek at her,
say *Mommy, this Ryleigh's room,*
the very room we would
have picked for you.
You pull us into every closet,
every crawl space,
ensuring Miss Kitty sees
all corners of the new house.

Leaving the house,
you again hide in a cupboard,
say *Mommy, no leave.*
We stay here, no go home!
You tell the landlord
This Ryleigh's house now.
A squeal echoes in the cupboard
when I say
Yes, this is our new home.
Then you nod,
I know.

A Mother's Nightmare

You scream.
I drop the plate
into the sink.

Your nose is flat
against the floor,
your cheeks are clouds
streaming rain.

I rush to you
and your arms tighten
around my neck,
your tears
saturate my clothes.

Cheek to cheek,
your tears cascade
past my lips— then
metallic taste.

Your once-blonde hair,
matted, red,
eyelashes stuck together.

At the hospital
your tiny fingers
catch my tears.
You say,
Mommy, don't cry.

My heart stops.

Dancing in the Snow

The wind freezes the air in my lungs
and I struggle forward into it.
There is no ice, but I slip in the slush,
lose hold of your hand.
Snow flurries swirl around us,
a tornado blinding me. You call out,
*Mommy, it's snowing! Dance with me,
mommy!* The glint of your blond hair
breaks through the white fog as your
tiny fingers find mine again and you
spin me around and around, saying
Mommy, snow makes us dance pretty!
Dizzy, we finally collapse in the giant
bed of snow, no longer shivering.

Paw Prints in the Snow

You twirl around,
catching the flurries
on your tongue
before you collapse
on the twinkling
blanket of snow.

You take off your gloves
and squeal, *Oooh, Kitty look,*
snow soft like you,
as you help Miss Kitty
put her paw in the snow
and make a
kitty snow angel.

With your aid,
Miss Kitty frolics
through the
fluffy frosting,
decorating it with
little paw prints.

At the State Park

With small Hello Kitty shoes
you put one foot in front of the other,
moving slowly across a fallen log.
You slip, and the grass
catches you in its embrace.

Tall oaks arch overhead
and the sun peeks
through the branches
in waving shadows.

With your walking stick
you follow the shadows,
trying to trap them
beneath the stick.

A twinkle of light
glistens in the distance
and you're gone.

I follow your giggle
deep into the woods,
where a moss-covered stump
has become your pillow
and auburn leaves
have tucked you in to sleep.

The leaves do not mind
your fake snore,
they are happy to
feel your warmth and
hold you close.

A Lesson in Physics

Walking in
woods your daddy played in,
now your secret fortress.
The gentle flow of the creek
lures you to its edge.
You laugh wicked
as your walking stick
hits the water with a splash,
your eyes following
as it floats away.
You toss a leaf into the creek
but it glides like a feather
onto your head.
Rock after rock
finds its new home
in the water,
a puzzled look
when they sink,
but sticks float.

You hold another rock
on top of the water,
f'loat, rock, f'loat,
but it plunges
to the bottom.
You grab a stick
and push it to the creek bed,
stay down, stick,
but it pops
to the surface.

You stare at the water
for a moment,
then run to my arms
shouting, *Mommy,*
rocks fall down,
but sticks f'loat!

When it's time to leave,
you say *Bye-bye trees,*
Bye-bye rocks,
'ank you for p'aying with me
and walk up the hill
your sneakers sinking

into the mud.

Not Listening

A white web shimmers
as sunlight caresses
the far corner of the porch.
The spider peeks from
a crevice in the ceiling
that seems much too small
for its grape-sized body.
It has lived here for a year,
but keeps to itself
and you think its web is pretty.

At night, you're scared
of going to sleep, screaming
Bugs in my bed, mommy!
Though none can be found,
you shake, cry in my shoulder
every night for a week
insisting they're there.

I tell you bugs can't hurt you,
don't you like the spider on the porch?
But you sob, *Mommy, it's my bed!*
No want bugs my bed,
kill em, mommy, peeez!

One morning,
I awake to thousands of
termites
covering floors, beds.

Anger freezes my blood,
these bugs
scared you
I didn't believe you
about these monsters
in the closet, under the bed,
in your bed.

Naming

Leaves crunch underfoot
as you race to a large rock,
flat on top with colored swirls.
Oooh pretty, you squeal
as you sit on it, tracing
the lines with your finger.
It's a Sitting On Rock,
I tell you, *can you find another?*

Jumping off, you run to
a smaller uneven rock
and try to sit, but you slide off.
You climb on again,
but remain standing.
It's a Standing On Rock,
I tell you, and you jump off to find another.

The next rock juts sharply
from the ground, tall, skinny,
and you stare, unsure what to do.
Leaning your back against it,
you try to sit, but fall to the dirt.
You raise your leg to climb it,
but there are no foot holds.
Your smile dissipates and
a tear glistens in your eye.

Finding a stick, I tap on the rock
and your smile returns
as you say *Tap, tap, tap*
and a wave of understanding hits you.
It's a Tapping On Rock, mommy!

Nature's Song

The fern stands listless
 twisting
to escape the cold.
Still elegant,
as its hips
 sway in time
with the
 fall of the snow.

The Earth's History

I walk in woods
and find a clearing
filled with stumps
wider around
than my arms can encircle,
generations of rings
canvassed in each core,
left to rot.

Later, stars are
barely visible
through the thick yellow fog,
hovering over the city.

In the fluorescent river,
old cans and tires
collide into rocks
and the stench
of sewage
turns my nose.

How radiant
the Earth
must have been
long ago,
before she was
inhabited.

The Storm

Lightning shatters
the sky
and thunder growls
at the Earth.
Clouds drop
fierce, heavy torrents
that reverberate
like a stampede
of wild animals.

Waking Up From Anesthesia

White.

Particles
race around me,
a tornado spinning.

A voice screams.

Icy hands
compress my chest,
blood crystallizes into ice.

Trapped in a blizzard,
buried in snow,
can't feel my toes.

Icicles stab, vision fades.

Everything goes numb,
but I still hear
my screaming...

The Weeping Willow

Rain gushes,
an avalanche
from swollen clouds.
The weeping willow
drinks the water,
shelters me
from the storm,
cradles me
in the crook
of her strong arm.
Her whispering leaves
softly rock
me to sleep.

Winter Flurries

Rays of sunshine
peek through clouds
as snowflakes
cascade from the sky,
twinkling like

s
h
o
o
t
i
n
g

stars
that disintegrate
just before reaching
the Earth's surface.

Snowflake

A
s n o w f l a k e s i n g l e s
e g l i s t e n s
on a bare tree limb
e m i n i s c u l e
F r a g u n i q u e .